

A True Testimony in the Truth (3 John 11-15)

1. The elder's concern with Diotrephes (v.9-10)

While the immediate recipients would have been familiar with the context behind this letter, we (contemporary readers) are unable to say with any certainty whether Diotrephes' held an official church office (elder/deacon), hosted the gathering of the church at his house, was a divisive congregant, or congregated in the same Christian community as Gaius.

However, we can conclude with confidence that there was unresolved animosity and division between Diotrephes and the elder which was destructive not only to the health of congregational life but also to missionaries who were sent out for the sake of the name (v.7-8). What are the charges the elder (John) brings against Diotrephes?

- A. He is putting himself first (v.9): He is more concerned with the glory of his own name than bringing glory to the Name (Col. 1:18). He is prideful and self-assertive.
- B. He does not submit to the elder's (John's) authority and those who support him (v.9): At best, Diotrephes should submit to the elder (John) as a commissioned apostle.
- C. He is speaking "wicked nonsense": Diotrephes is gossiping and slandering against the elder (John), Gaius, and the brothers/friends (v.3, 5, 10, 15).
- D. He refuses to welcome the brothers (v.10): Diotrephes does not extend support or hospitality to these brothers/strangers who labor for the Name (v.7).
- E. He excommunicates ("puts out") anyone in the congregation who supports John and his associates (v.10): Diotrephes is not only content with closing his door on these missionaries but also threatens anyone who sides with the elder (John).

Diotrephes is a self-obsessed man concerned with the glory of his name and not the Name (v.7). The elder (John) will not allow him to continue in his divisiveness. The elder (John) intends to visit this community, confront Diotrephes, and encourage Gaius (v.10, 13-14).

2. The elders' command to Gaius (v.11)

- A. "Do not imitate evil."
 - The first imperative in this letter is: "imitate" (v.11) and given to Gaius in a contrasting manner: "do not imitate evil but imitate good." Who or what is evil?
 - Contextually, this "evil" is refusing to extend hospitality to these traveling missionaries and itinerant preachers who go out for the sake of the Name (v.7).
 - It also stands in contrast to the behavior of Diotrephes, who hinders the work of those propagating the Name (v.7-8) and may also be alluding to the destructive behavior of Diotrephes. However, he does not call Diotrephes evil.
 - Whether Diotrephes is in a settled state of corruption as unregenerate or engaged in a pattern of sin as redeemed, we do not know. Regardless, he needs to be confronted.
- B. "Imitate good."
 - Since Diotrephes' behavior is an allusion to evil, Demetrius' behavior is an allusion to good. The elder (John) is not commanding Gaius to "be good" but to "imitate good."
 - This "imitation" is only possible for those who are "from God."

"Whoever does good is from God." How do we make sense of this?

Man naturally has no intrinsic goodness but only a continual, pervasive evil and wickedness propagated by the corruption of sin (Ps. 14:3; Ps. 53:1-3; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10-12).

What God must do independent from man (Regeneration)

- When God monergistically regenerates a man, He causes them to be "born again" and permanently indwells the new creature with the agency of the Holy Spirit.
- Regeneration precedes faith. When a man is born again (regenerated), he is given a new nature. This transformed, redeemed sinner is no longer only able to sin but instead able to sin or able not to sin.

What God must do through man (Progressive Sanctification)

- The sin that once "presided" in the sinner now "resides" and no longer has dominion (Rom. 6:14-16). Over time, the redeemed sinner casts off his former sins and puts on the righteousness of God (Col. 3:1-17).
- This "putting on" and "putting off" is synergistic, which includes man working out what God has worked and is working in him (Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 1:29).
- In this new state, through dwelling (and filling) of the Holy Spirit, this new creature can do good because God, Who is good, dwells inside of him (Mk. 10:18, Lk. 18:19), working out His goodness through him.

The origin of salvation, which produces goodness (3 Jn. 11), is from the One who has seen God. No one has seen God (Jn. 1:18; 1 Jn. 4:12) other than the Son, and Holy Spirit, Who is God. The Holy Spirit is not only God but sent from God (John 14:15-26) and proceeds from both the Father and the Son missionally. The Holy Spirit works out God's goodness in us through our willing cooperation.

Gaius is to imitate Demetrius as Demetrius imitates Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Gaius may be facing tremendous difficulty and pressure from Diotrephes to follow his name instead of the Name (v.7-8).

3. The elder's commendation of Demetrius (v.12)

- In v.12, "testimony" is used three times, and "truth" is used twice.

The three-fold testimony of Demetrius (v.12):

- A. Everyone endorses him (v.12a): he is approved and well-spoken by outsiders, especially those in the truth.
- B. The truth endorses him (v.12b): "the truth" can mean:
 - The gospel message (truth) testifies to his faithfulness.
 - Demetrius faithfully venerates Jesus Christ. In other words, Demetrius is the imitation of Christlikeness in the flesh. He is godly.
- C. The elder John and others (we) endorse him (v.12c): those who know him intimately affirm the true testimony of his life.

John intends to visit Gaius and encourages him, as the recipient of this letter, to greet not only Demetrius (courier of this letter) but also the "friends" (Jn. 15:13-15) who share the same passion for the glory of the Name (v.7-8).